



Weekly Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

The Sydney Bridge Centre runs a morning session on Monday in both venues in City and Canada Bay. They play the same hands and we run inter-venue competitions from time to time. Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Monday morning session. His column is updated weekly and published on the Sydney Bridge Centre website, under "Learn Bridge".

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played.

Defensive signals, sacrifices and deciding whether to double or bid on

City (Open and Rookie) and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 10th July 2023

11	♠ JT98754	Dlr: S
	♥ 97	Vul: Nil
	♦ K92	
	♣ 4	
♠ AQ2	♠ K843	4
♥ QJT65	♥ AQ63	12 12
♦ 84	♦ K8653	12
♣ QJ7		
♠ K63	♠ NT	
♥ A2	N - - - 1 -	
♦ JT75	S - - - 1 -	
♣ AT92	E 4 1 4 - 3	
	W 4 1 4 - 3	

Board 11 saw a game for East West although North South will surely be tempted to bid over it. If they do East West will have to decide whether to double or bid on themselves. We'll come back to that.

South will open 1 of a minor (exactly which one may depend on their system agreements) and West will overcall 1♥. Even though North has only 4 high card points his hand has lots of playing strength and he should definitely bid some number of spades. I would start with 1♠ (usually showing at least 5 in this sequence - see advanced section for more). Another option that could be considered is 2♠ (weak) - again only if playing that. When you hold spades it's less important to jump around

pre-empting though because you can always outbid the opponents at the same level. So leaving more room with 1♠ may be better.

Now over to East. After partner's 1♥ overcall his hand is huge with 12 points, good 4 card support and a void. If North bids 1♠ I would now bid 3♠, a splinter showing spade shortage and a hand worth a raise to at least 4♥. Hearing of spade shortage opposite his ♠AQ isn't so good for West so he will sign off in 4♥. If North bids 2♠ initially I would still bid 3♠ as East although this time, with less space available, it is a "cue raise" showing a good raise to 4♥ - there isn't room to get the extra information about the shortage across (a direct bid of 4♥ is then played as a weaker more pre-emptive hand). Either way, the spade bid over his ♠AQx also devalues West's hand so he should still sign off in 4♥.

4♥ is fine for East West and should make 10 tricks if the defence take their club ruff immediately. The biggest challenge will be if, after receiving a club ruff, North continues with a diamond. Declarer will not like taking the diamond finesse now because, if it loses, he will probably run into a 2nd club ruff. However, he is missing the ♥A which he is going to have to knock out before he can score club tricks. So he has to risk trying the diamond finesse - he can't make the contract without it. If the defence don't get their club ruff declarer will make 11 tricks.

Over 4♥, however, North South might well consider 4♠. South may raise to 3♠ (or double a 3♠ bid by East) and it's surely now very likely that North will bid onto 4♠, a sacrifice bid hoping the penalty is going to be lower than the score for the opponent's 4♥ making. As long as East doesn't bid 5♥ (see below) West, with his spade holding, will surely double 4♠.

Now it's up to the defence to beat 4♠x by enough. It should go 3 off losing a heart, ♠AQ, ♦AQ and a diamond ruff. East will surely lead a heart which declarer will probably win. He will most likely play ♣A and a club ruff to reach his hand in order to lead ♠J in the (forlorn) hope that the ♠Q is with East. No good - West wins the ♠Q and cashes ♥Q. At this point (or in fact when he gets in later with ♠A) he can lead a diamond through to East's ♦AQ and score a diamond ruff with his ♠2. There are several ways East can, and should, signal diamonds - the most obvious is by his discard on the first round of trumps but there are other more subtle ways too - see advanced section.

This time 4♠x going 3 off for -500 is not a success for North South as that's more than the 420 or 450 East West can make. Note how important the vulnerability is to that result. When both sides are the same vulnerability you can only afford to go 2 off for a sacrifice to work (-300 v -420 or -500 v -620). It's only at favourable vulnerability (not vul v vul) where you can

afford to go 3 off (-500 v -620). Many pairs try to sacrifice too often but, on this hand, I would have a lot of sympathy. It is so often right to bid 4♠ over 4♥.

In fact on this hand it might still work in practice - it's possible East will bid onto 5♥ (to West's annoyance who will want to double!). If North South then beat 5♥ with their club ruff that would be a huge result. A "forcing pass" can enable East West to solve the problem of what to do over 4♠ though - see advanced section.

Key points to note

- After 1m (1♥) it's handy to play X as 4 spades and 1♠ as 5+ spades.
- When you have a strong hand with support for partner's overcall you should make a "cue raise" showing values - just raising in your suit can then be weaker and more distributional. This helps partner judge later.
- Besides obvious signals like discards there are lots of opportunities for more advanced players to give additional suit preference signals during the defence.
- At equal vulnerability you can only afford to be 2 off in a sacrifice.
- A "forcing pass" can help a partnership decide whether to bid on or double the opponents' sacrifice. But it's important to try to agree when a pass is and isn't forcing.
- Bidding 5 over 5 is usually wrong unless you have a REALLY shapely hand!

More advanced

After 1m 1♥ it's a useful method to play that 1♠ guarantees at least 5 spades and double shows exactly 4. That helps find a spade fit more quickly if there is one. However, some pairs play a different method where 1♠ is 4+ (i.e. as it would be without the overcall) and double shows a hand without 4 spades that has some values but no obvious bid. As usual each method will work on some hands and not others. I have tried both and I vastly prefer 1♠ showing 5 – the knowledge of how many spades partner has seems to be an important factor far more frequently than being able to bid something on a hand without 4 spades.

Besides East discarding an encouraging diamond or a discouraging club on the first or second round of trumps what other signals can he give that he wants a diamond shift? The first is when West cashes his ♥Q. East at that point will have ♥K84 left. He can't play ♥K as he wants West on lead but he has a free choice of ♥8 and ♥4. He should play the ♥8 which is suit preference for the higher of the other two suits – i.e. diamonds. Even if West is asleep at that point and plays a club to force declarer to ruff, this time East can play his lowest remaining club - once again suit preference, this time for the lower of the other two side suits. And of course East has another discard to make on the 2nd round of trumps as well. There's really no excuse for West to go wrong on this hand!

There are countless ways during the defence of most hands for these subtle little suit preference signals to be given by both defenders. It's why experts will seldom get a defence wrong later in the hand because they will have been able to exchange much more information than many less experienced players will realise! The time to get them to mis-defend is early in the hand before they have much information.

Of course none of this should be necessary here. Once declarer ruffs a club in hand, West can see the only other suit the defence can get more tricks in is diamonds so he should be switching to the suit whatever East plays!

Lastly let's discuss forcing passes. It's a notorious area of confusion which many expert pairs still have disagreements over(!) but, in general, if your side has CONSTRUCTIVELY bid to game (i.e. you've shown the values) then they are sacrificing over your contract and you will need to decide whether to bid on or double them. What you won't do is pass out their contract undoubled. It works very well on a hand like this. North is likely to be the one who bids 4♠ and East isn't sure what to do. From his point of view 4♠x may not be going far off and they could easily be making 5♥. But he doesn't want to bid 5♥ himself and find partner with a defensive hand. Likewise he doesn't want to double and find partner with an offensive hand that would make 5♥ easily while they are only taking 4♠ one or two off. The solution is the "forcing pass" which passes the decision back to West. East's pass is saying he's prepared to bid on but is giving West the choice. On this hand, with lots of values in spades and a balanced shape West should definitely double. If East had had a defensive hand himself he should double 4♠ which is warning West he doesn't think it's right to bid on. Of course West can still overrule that and bid on

anyway if he has a really shapely hand. But the forcing pass allows both partners to have input to the decision. It's always frustrating to be sitting there itching to double opponents who you know are in big trouble only to find partner bidding on in front of you! But you need to be clear in your discussions. Where most partnership disagreements happen is defining exactly when passes are forcing and when they are not. It's equally frustrating to make what you are sure is a forcing pass (happy for partner to bid on or double) - only to find partner doesn't think it is a forcing pass situation and passes them out undoubled!

Finally another word of caution. Many pairs play too many forcing passes. There will always be freak hands where, even though you have lots of points and have bid constructively to game, their contract might be making anyway - shape beats points every time in bridge! It's often safer on very shapely hands to be bidding on. That said, bidding at the 5 level over the opponent's 5 level contract is wrong an amazing proportion of the time (in the same way that bidding 4♠ over 4♥ is right an amazing proportion of the time). So you should be extremely shapely to bid "5 over 5". High level decisions are really hard though - no one can ever get them all right!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)